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AUTHOR Kuper, Glenn
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ABSTRACT

Over the past five years, many forensics programs and students have been undertaking competition in parliamentary debate. During the same period, policy debate has seen a decline in the number of schools participating. A survey of students participating in debate tournaments asked their reasons for choosing one type of debate over another: Why do some students choose to do policy debate, while others choose to do parliamentary debate? Written surveys were distributed at a major tournament in the Northwest offering both debate types. After students were asked why they participated in policy or parliamentary debate, they were asked whether they were satisfied with the type of debate in which they were participating. Of those given surveys, 83 returned them--59 parliamentary debaters and 24 policy debaters. Class standing was fairly well distributed among the students, but policy debaters were a little more concentrated among freshmen. Surveys were then content analyzed. Responses fell into 18 different categories, with six categories receiving most frequent mention: research, high school participation, education, depth, analysis, and community. Findings suggest that the unique characteristics of each event seem to be of primary importance to students when choosing their debate event. Policy debaters enjoy its research emphasis, while parliamentary debaters enjoy the opportunity to debate many current, relevant issues over the course of a tournament. In addition, there are some possible modifications that could make each debate more attractive to its participants, such as preventing burnout to retain policy debaters. (NKA)

Student Motivations for Participating in Policy or Parliamentary Debate

Glenn Kuper

University of Puget Sound

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Student Motivations for Participating in Policy or Parliamentary Debate

Over the past five years, many forensics programs and students have been undertaking competition in parliamentary debate. Tournaments began offering parliamentary debate in the West in 1991, with the National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA) forming in 1992. The first national tournament hosted by NPDA took place in 1994, with fifty-two teams attending. The phenomenal growth of the organization can be illustrated by the over two hundred teams attempting to attend the national tournament in 1999.¹

During the same period, policy debate has seen a decline in the number of schools participating. Attendance at the CEDA national tournament has gone down, and the West has seen many policy programs either eliminated or minimized. For example, during the 1998-99 season the Northwest region had seven schools participating in CEDA debate. As recently as 1995-96 fourteen schools received CEDA points in the Northwest. Continue going back in time and the number of schools participating in CEDA continues to rise. On a national level, the results are similar. In 1995-96, 241 schools were members of CEDA. In 1999-00, that number was down to 195. Over the same time period, the number of schools earning at least one CEDA point declined from 202 to 170.²

There has been a lot of speculation on the list-serves and in meetings about why so many schools and students have stopped doing CEDA debate, and why so many programs have decided to participate in the parliamentary format. The rapid rate of delivery, lack of "real-world" arguments, and the enormous work commitment necessary

¹ Al Johnson, An Early History of the NPDA, National Parliamentary Debate Association Homepage, <http://www.bethel.edu/Majors/Communication/npda/npdahistory.html>, Last Updated June 30, 1999.

to succeed are all reasons mentioned for leaving CEDA debate. Recently there has been extensive discussion on E-debate (the college debate listserve) about the transition of CEDA from non-policy to policy debate, and the effect the transition may have had on CEDA participation. Supporters of parliamentary believe parliamentary debate can and does "exemplify extemporaneous, reasoned, informed, public debates. . . toward which. . . the activity should strive."³

Though the literature cites some reasons for the decline of policy and the rise of parliamentary debate, there has not been an attempt to systematically survey students to discover their reasons for choosing one type of debate over another. Why do students choose to do policy debate? Why do other students choose to do parliamentary debate? I believe that answering these questions will allow proponents of each type of debate to continue to adapt and modify their chosen debate format. The answers to these questions will also allow coaches to choose which type of format works best for their program.

Understanding student's motivations can also have other benefits for coaches and scholars. Hill cited these benefits when he surveyed students in 1982 to determine why they debate.⁴ The four benefits include: informing the speech communication discipline about the role debate plays in education, clarifying for administrators the value of forensics, educating coaches about the motivations of their students, and helping students understand why others find the activity desirable. I believe my study can also create these four benefits and build on the results of Hill's scholarship.

² Greg Simerly, CEDA Executive Secretary, Personal email, March 27, 2000.

³ Robert Trapp, Parliamentary Debate, National Parliamentary Debate Association Homepage, <http://www.bethel.edu/Majors/Communication/npda/npdahistory.html>, Accessed September 1, 1999.

⁴ Bill Hill, "Intercollegiate Debate: Why Do Students Bother?," *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 48 (Fall 1982): 77-79. Though Hill does not specify, I am assuming that the debaters he surveyed were participating in NDT. Hill identifies the survey sample as partially coming from a District qualifying

Literature Review

There has not been an extensive amount of research done to determine why students choose to participate in particular forensics events. Bill Hill, in his 1982 study "Intercollegiate debate: Why do students bother?" explored the reasons why students choose to debate; however, because this study took place in the early 1980's, parliamentary debate was not a factor, and all the students surveyed were likely competing in policy debate.⁵ Hill found that the majority of students' motivations for participating in debate fell into four categories: educational needs, social needs, competitive needs, and career preparation needs. The most frequent individual responses were competition, enjoyment/fun, travel, improving communication skills, improving analytical skills, and social interaction. The motivations cited by the participants in Hill's study seem likely to remain constant over time since the intrinsic benefits of forensics have not changed over the past eighteen years.

In 1989, Wood and Rowland-Morin did a study replicating the questions posed by Hill.⁶ They found that student motivations had, in fact, remained consistent. The authors also concluded that there were few differences between motivations reported by novice and varsity debaters, and they discovered that CEDA debaters were more motivated by educational concerns than students participating in NDT.

Finally, Kevin T. Jones furthered Hill's research by conducting oral interviews with debaters in an attempt to gain greater depth of understanding about student's

tournament, which would almost certainly have been for the NDT, as well as Wake Forest and the University of Georgia, both NDT programs.

⁵ Hill 79-80.

⁶ Stephen Wood and Pamela Rowland-Morin, "Motivational Tension: Winning vs. Pedagogy in Academic Debate," *National Forensics Journal* 7 (1989): 81-98.

motivations for participating in debate.⁷ Jones found five categories of responses to the initial question, "Why do you debate?" The categories are cerebral, competition, heuristic, social, and miscellaneous.⁸ Jones then asked a follow-up question pushing the respondent to describe his/her answer in more detail. He found that students receive intellectual reinforcement from debate, and that debate provides a unique forum for the "cerebral gymnastics" that act as an outlet for one's intellectual skills.

Though the literature provides an excellent basis for understanding why students debate, there has been very little literature examining why programs have been abandoning evidence-based debate. Terry West hypothesizes six reasons why policy debate declined in the late 1990's.⁹ They are: 1) an intense urge to create a national circuit; 2) loss of scholarly legitimacy; 3) errors in leadership; 4) parliamentary debate; 5) resource push-pull; and 6) geographic disparity. I believe the reasons presented by West are fairly representative of the opinions of many debate coaches. Gentry also lists many of the common complaints about policy debate, and cites these complaints as potential causes of the decline in participation. Included among Gentry's list are "the debaters manner of delivery, problems in evidence and logic, an over-reliance on procedural issues, and a lack of civility."¹⁰

An explanation of the motivations for switching to parliamentary debate can be found in Sheckels and Warfield's "Parliamentary Debate: A Description and a

⁷ Kevin T. Jones, "Cerebral Gymnastics 101: Why Do Debaters Debate," CEDA Yearbook 15 (1994): 65-75.

⁸ Jones 67.

⁹ Terry West, "Smaller is better--Response to Hester on novice debate," Edebate posting, October 26, 1999.

¹⁰ Jeffery Gentry, "But When They Shine: Great Students in Policy Debate," The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta 85 (Winter 2000): 2-3.

Justification."¹¹ The authors described parliamentary debate as practiced by the American Parliamentary Debate Association (APDA), an organization mainly comprised of student-run programs in the East, and asked students to rank possible motivations for participation. Sheckels and Warfield found that: "They wanted to develop public speaking and argumentation skills; they appreciated parliamentary debate's extemporaneous, oratorical character; and they valued the travel opportunities and the friends made on the circuit."¹² This study is now ten years old, and it will be interesting to discover if students still compete in parliamentary debate for similar reasons.

Method

Written surveys were distributed at a major tournament in the Northwest offering both policy and parliamentary debate. Students were asked to explain why they choose to do the type of debate in which they were currently participating. They were then asked whether they were satisfied with the type of debate in which they were participating. Eighty-three students returned the survey, fifty-nine by parliamentary debaters and twenty-four by policy debaters. This skew was expected due to the number of students participating in each type of debate at the tournament. The class standing of the respondents was fairly well distributed among the parliamentary debaters, with twenty-two freshmen, sixteen sophomores, ten juniors, and eleven seniors. The policy debaters were a little more concentrated among freshmen, with fifteen freshmen, five sophomores, one junior, and three seniors.

The surveys were then content analyzed. Each of the reasons given were recorded and grouped with others' responses that were roughly similar. The responses to the

¹¹ Theodore F. Sheckels, Jr. and Annette C. Warfield, "Parliamentary Debate: A Description and a Justification," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 27 (Fall 1990): 86-96.

question about satisfaction were recorded as either yes or no, with the reasons given for dissatisfaction also categorized.

Results

The responses provided by the policy debaters fell into eighteen different categories, with six categories receiving most frequent mention. The six categories, in rank order, are research, high school participation, education, depth, analysis, and community. Each of the top six categories received three or more responses. The motivations provided by the parliamentary debaters divided into nineteen categories, with the six most frequent categories being broad, relevant issues; only option; communicative delivery; logic and reason; extemporaneous/quick thinking; and less preparation demands. The top six categories each received nine or more responses. Table One lists the policy responses in rank order, and Table Two reports the parliamentary responses.

Table 1
Rank Ordering of Responses by Frequency
Policy Debaters

Response	Frequency
Research	12
Did it in high school	6
Educational	5
Depth	4
Analytical	3
Community	3
Justified reason for decision	2
Speak fast	2
Like policy	2
Money	2
Fills time	1
Competition	1
Cross-examination	1
Two speeches each	1
Team needs	1
Multiple issues	1
Partner	1
Strategic	1
TOTAL	49

¹² Sheckels and Warfield 93.

Table 2
Rank Ordering of Responses by Frequency
Parliamentary Debaters

Response	Frequency
Broad/Relevant issues	18
Only choice	17
More communication/oratory	17
Logic and reason	12
Extemporaneous/quick thinking	10
Less preparation	10
Fun	8
Practical life skills	6
Helps speaking skills	5
Money	4
Format	3
More spontaneity	2
Partner	2
Stronger part of squad	1
Resource availability	1
Variety of types of topics	1
Easy to start	1
Sees both sides of issues	1
TOTAL	119

The policy debaters who expressed some dissatisfaction with their current participation listed four reasons, with two mentioning burnout, and one each listing excessive plan-inclusive counterplans and morality arguments; excessive competition and sophistry; and a desire for more kritiks. Each of these responses came in the context of the student being satisfied overall, but feeling some reservations.

There were a few parliamentary debaters who expressed overall dissatisfaction with parliamentary debate. Some of the key complaints included the lack of a cross-examination period, the desire for two speeches per speaker, a dislike for the "squirrling" of topics to make them fit pre-prepared cases, and a preference for more pre-tournament disclosure of topic areas. There were also some parliamentary participants who articulated an overall satisfaction with the activity, but still felt some problems need to be fixed. They also included a desire for cross-examination and two speeches per debater,

as well as a strong preference for more consistent judging with oral critiques, a desire for some evidence usage, a dislike of coaches writing cases, and dissatisfaction with the amount of lying about facts that occurs during rounds.

Discussion

There are a few conclusions that can be drawn from the results. First, the unique characteristics of each event seem to be of primary importance to students when choosing their debate event. Policy debaters overwhelmingly enjoy the research emphasis of policy debate, as well as the depth of education that is received. As one student stated, "I was actually planning to do parli. this year but I started cutting cards over the summer and all of a sudden was having too much fun." Another commented, "I enjoy how in depth the debates get in order to be effective in policy; it is necessary to really delve into the various issues." These are benefits that are unlikely to be received in parliamentary debate, and are not motivations listed by any parliamentary debaters.

Parliamentary debaters, on the other hand, enjoy the opportunity to debate many current, relevant issues over the course of a tournament, like a more oratorical delivery style, prefer less pre-tournament preparation, and appreciate an emphasis on logic, reason and quick thinking. As one student explained, "I am a better speaker than arguer. I also think CEDA has no practical application in life, takes way too much time to research, and is too much like a game." Another student summarized, "CEDA is a lifestyle, not an extra-curricular activity. Parli. gives me the debate skills with a limited investment." Finally, a parliamentary debater argued, "I consider parliamentary debate a stronger form of debate because it is based on the art of not only communicating but substance as well. This type of debate deals with reasoning and speech skill" The first three

motivations are not typically found in policy debate, and the fourth, though present in policy debate, is sometimes overshadowed by the use of researched evidence.

Because the benefits and motivations provided by each activity are so distinct and unique, we can conclude that perhaps the two activities are not really in competition. Short of taking CEDA back to the 1980's, it is difficult to imagine many parliamentary debaters choosing to switch to modern-day policy debate. The CEDA debate of the 1980's used multiple topics, different topic formats, and had more emphasis on delivery. The evolution of CEDA in the 1990's, however, eliminated these characteristics, and parliamentary now provides students with these options. It is also unlikely parliamentary debate will begin using researched evidence in rounds, deterring many policy debaters from making the switch.

There was one student, however, who did express a desire to return to policy debate in some form, if it were more accessible. S/he said, "the research burdens for CEDA are impossible for small non-elite schools [emphasis in original]." S/he continues, "[CEDA] is by far the superior form of debate and encourages more critical, dialectical, and advanced thinking skills than parly could ever wish to. However, big schools need to be more willing to help small schools or the only schools that will continue to do CEDA are schools with huge hordes of people and budgets." I believe this is an opinion felt by some students in parliamentary debate, and policy schools need to think about ways of assisting those who would like to return to the policy format.

A second conclusion is that there are some possible modifications that could be done to make each debate more attractive to its participants. Preventing burnout is probably the most significant factor in retaining policy debaters. The workload and travel

schedule are typically very hectic, and it is easy to see why students would find their commitment beginning to wane. There has been some talk of lengthening the season, but I am not sure that making the season longer helps even though it may decrease the intensity of the earlier months. In parliamentary debate, there seems to be some interest in both formalizing a cross-examination period and adding second rebuttals. Others may find that such moves would detract from the unique format of parliamentary debate. Students would also like a better sense from judges of what they want to hear in the round, and more flexibility from the critics. Finally, one student was especially adamant that judges needed to do a better job of forcing the teams to actually debate the resolution, rather than opting for a "canned" pre-prepared case. Allowing teams to debate the same case over and over seems to cut against the motivation to engage in debate over a wide variety of topics.

Limitations

A couple of factors limit the conclusions to be drawn from the previous results. First, the sample sizes are not enormous, especially in relation to policy debate. Second, the surveys were done in only one region of the country, the Northwest. It is possible that policy and/or parliamentary debate may be practiced in unique ways in this region, and these unique practices may result in perspectives on debate not typical of the nation as a whole. Further research should focus on expanding both the size and the breadth of students surveyed to increase the validity of the results.

Conclusion

Many in forensics have advocated a "big-tent" theory--that we should have many different events to accommodate as many students as possible. Different students have

different motivations for participating in forensics, and these different motivations will lead them into different parts of the activity. Having both policy and parliamentary debate available will attract different students into forensics and provide different benefits. We should still try, however, to help those who would like to participate in policy or parliamentary debate but find the current practice to be troublesome. Coaches should consider how the current benefits of each even can be maintained while opening the activity up to others with different motivations. Finally, some changes should be considered in each activity to make it more appealing to those already participating. Further research should be done on a more national level to determine if students nationally feel similar to those in the Northwest region.